



Four inches wider than in the current rig, the central aisle will easily hold 40 small dog or cat crates.

Most of the 54 cages will have removable dividers, allowing more flexibility in how animals are housed. They will be big enough to transport two large dogs each, one on either side of the divider. Or the dividers can be removed so a group of animals can be placed inside.

A 6-foot overhang on the back of the new trailer, versus an 11-foot overhang on the current one, will reduce the risk of running into obstacles such as trees during tight turns.

Animals can be brought in a wide side door to a vet station.

RESCUE READY: THE NEW BIG RIG

// BY KAREN E. LANGE

// ILLUSTRATIONS BY LEANNE KROLL

WHEN THE HSUS "BIG RIG" was created in 2005, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it was state of the art. Built on a converted car carrier, it could transport 75 large dogs, as well as dozens of small dogs and cats.

Over the next decade, more than 16,500 rescued animals traveled to safety in the tractor-trailer as it crisscrossed the country, displaying the HSUS logo and the organization's commitment to respond to animals in crisis. It visited every one of the contiguous states, covering more than 10,000 miles a year.

But the rig, designed for highways, took a beating every time driver Perry Stone had to follow a dirt road, pull into a cow pasture or make his way through desert sand and rain-soaked muck. Over many years of cleaning, its steel and wood structure

began to wear down. And, like any old vehicle, it required more and more maintenance.

Enter the new sheltering trailer, scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. Custom-built with the help of a donation from HSUS member Donald Sinex in honor of his English springer spaniels, Ranger and Chloe, the trailer will hold more large dogs than the current rig because every cage will be big enough to house them. Small dogs and cats will also be able to ride in the two rows of cages.

"The point is flexibility," says Sára Varsa, director of operations for the Animal Rescue Team. The trailer will be constructed of rust-resistant aluminum and feature an operations planning space with a kitchen and bathroom that can expand when parked to give rescuers twice as much room. It will also have a veterinary station, a built-in generator and a smoother ride for the animals.

Stone has a lot of memories of the old rig—among them riding in the cab with Duke, the old Lab he rescued from an Arizona hoarding case. But he says the new rig is the tool the team needs to rescue animals. "They'll be in comfort going where they're going."

The aluminum trailer will be easier to clean and lighter in weight, putting less stress on the frame.

An RV-style slide-out 9-foot expansion will allow more rescuers to escape from the weather and provide more space for hauling equipment or housing animals who need quiet.

An enclosed generator will be far quieter than the current one, so as not to scatter or stress animals, and it will be built-in, so that the trailer will still have power even without the tractor.



The veterinary station will provide space for exams and treatment.

Bags of pressurized air beneath the trailer will cushion the ride and, if the trailer has to pass beneath low branches or wires, can deflate temporarily so the vehicle drops 4 to 5 inches.

A table will provide a place for rescuers to confer, adapting plans as the situation becomes clearer.



CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SOSHI FU AND DEVONWOOD INVESTORS ALSO HELPED PAY FOR THE NEW SHELTERING TRAILER.